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## THE PAINTER'S WIFE.

'But you have not told me yet, Cyrilla, what incident the picture is intended to represent.'

'It is intended to illustrate the story of *'Ginevra,'* as told in Rogers's *Italy*. I daresay you recollect the poem in question?'

'O yes: I remember all about Francesco Doria and his youthful bride; and how the latter hid herself in an old chest on her wedding-day, and was smothered, and her body not found for ever so many years afterwards.'

'That is just the point—where *Ginevra* is about to hide herself—that Theodore is trying to illustrate. I have sat to him I don't know how many times already.'

'And a very good likeness it is of you, my dear. And the chest in which she is about to hide herself is painted from that real chest in the corner there! It looks hundreds of years old. Dear, dear! it's quite wonderful. But I thought painters always invented such things out of their own heads.'

The speakers were aunt and niece—the latter, a fair and slender girl of twenty, with a singularly youthful expression of face for one who was both a wife and a mother. The time was half-past nine on a certain autumn evening some half-dozen years ago; and the place was a pleasant home-like room in a small villa in one of the westerly suburbs of London.

'The mention of those Italian names, Cyrilla,' said Mrs Reece presently, 'puts me in mind of an old admirer of yours, Signor Pietro Fastini.—By the by, do you know where he now is?'

'No. Where?' said Cyrilla quickly.

'In a lunatic asylum. He went crazy about a year ago, and has been under restraint ever since. I don't think you treated him well, Cyrilla, to encourage his attentions, and then to cast him off in the way you did.'

Cyrilla's cheek paled suddenly; she sank into a chair, and did not speak for a minute or two. 'You have been misinformed, aunt,' she said at last. 'Signor Fastini never received the slightest encouragement from me. I was attracted towards

him by his great musical talent; but it was his own presumption that drew him on to speak to me as he did. Nevertheless, I am truly grieved to hear of the affliction that has overtaken him.'

Cyrilla sat thinking deeply for some time after her aunt's departure, going, in memory, through all those phases of her life in which the young Italian had been an actor. Her reverie was brought to an end by the clock on the mantel-piece chiming eleven.

She got up from her seat with a little sigh, and went into her dressing-room, which opened out of the room in which she had been sitting, and bathed her hands and face; and changed her evening-dress for a comfortable white wrapper; and unbound her yellow hair, letting it fall in a rich sheaf down her shoulders; for Theodore had gone out to-night to a supper-party given by a brother-artist who was about to enter the holy state of matrimony, and she had promised to sit up for him; and Theodore, on his part, had promised to be home soon after midnight.

Going back into the sitting-room, Cyrilla rang the bell, and presently nurse came in with baby, who, being a well-behaved young gentleman, was happily fast asleep at this late hour. He was deposited in a pretty little cot close by his mother's side. 'You can go to bed, nurse, and the other servants can do the same,' said Mrs Thornhurst. 'I will sit up for master myself. See that the doors and windows are all fastened before you go up-stairs.'

When the woman was gone, Cyrilla stirred up the low fire on the hearth into a fitful blaze, and then took up the first volume of a novel which had been brought her that afternoon from the library. Theodore would be home in an hour at the furthest, and the time would pass pleasantly and quickly away.

A pleasant, cozy, home-like picture—the pretty, girlish wife coiled up gracefully in her husband's huge easy-chair; the sleeping child; the room itself, with its walls half-hidden with sketches, prints, and water-colours, with the easel in one corner, and the pianoforte in another; with

Cyrylla's work-basket on a side-table in company with a meerschau, big and brown, and a tobacco-jar after the antique. A pleasant picture, and one which Theodore Thornhurst, artist from the top of his head to the sole of his foot, would not fail to note when he should come stepping leisurely in through one of the three French windows opening on to the lawn, which had just been draped, ready for winter, with curtains of crimson damask, in place of the muslin ones which had shaded them through the summer months.

Cyrylla read on undisturbed for about half an hour, at the end of which time baby began to grow restless; so she laid down her book, and began to rock the cot with a slow, gentle motion, and at the same time to sing, in a minor key, the exquisite cradle-song from *The Princess*—

Sweet and low, sweet and low,  
Wind of the western sea;  
Low, low, breathe and blow,  
Wind of the western sea!

Singing thus, she lifted the child tenderly out of its cot, kissed it fondly, and carried it through the dressing-room into the chamber beyond, and there laid it snugly in bed. Presently, she came back, still humming the music of the song under her breath, and leaving the door of the dressing-room half open behind her, so that she might the more readily hear her darling, should he awake and cry out. Then she sat down again in her husband's easy-chair, and went on with her novel. But the undercurrent of her thoughts was with her husband; and presently she glanced up at the timepiece on the mantel-shelf, only to discover that it had come to a dead stop some ten minutes previously, for want of winding up. She put down her book, and rose at once to perform the necessary duty, for the voice of the little clock sounded like that of a friend in her lonely watching. How the words of that song haunted her memory!

Sweet and low, sweet and low,  
Wind of the western sea.

She was winding up the timepiece slowly and carefully, and humming the song to herself, and as she did so—what woman would not have done the same?—she glanced at the reflection of her own pretty face in the glass over the chimney-piece. She saw her blue-eyed face with its setting of yellow hair, and the same moment she saw something else by no means so pleasant to look upon—something that for one brief instant caused every pulse of her being to stand still in silent horror.

There was some one in the room beside herself. What she saw in the glass was the reflection of a hand grasping the crimson damask curtains that draped the French window opposite the fireplace. Only a hand—but whose hand? It was very small and very white, but unmistakably the hand of a man, and just as surely not the big brown paw of Theodore Thornhurst.

Cyrylla's eyes dilated as she gazed; the murmur of the song died off her lips; her fingers ceased from turning the key of the clock; she stood like one changed to stone. She durst not turn her head to glance at the dread reality which she knew was behind her; she kept her gaze fixed steadily in the glass, watching with a sort of horrible eagerness for some sign or token of life in those white, deathlike fingers, which looked as if they belonged to a corpse. Suddenly, while she

was looking like one fascinated, there was a slight movement of the curtain, the white fingers relaxed their grasp, opened, and for an instant were withdrawn. Next moment, they were there again, grasping the curtain as before; and as they reappeared, Cyrylla's heart thrilled with a fresh terror: she felt—by instinct, and not by the action of any more positive sense—that, from amid the dim folds of the curtain, two eyes, unseen by her, were watching her every movement.

The dread inspired by this discovery—for she felt sure that her instinct was not playing her false—was almost more than she could bear. Her senses seemed as though they were about to desert her; a dimness crept over her eyes; a numbness began to steal through every limb; and it seemed to her as though the room, herself, and even that terrible hand, were all fading into unsubstantial shadows, and that nothing could ever trouble her more; when all at once her fading senses were pierced by a faint sound—a sound that went straight to her mother's heart, and in one brief moment stung all her fading senses into vivid life. It was the voice of her child that she had heard just as she was about to sink fainting to the floor. He had turned over in his sleep, and had felt for her in the dark, and had given utterance to a low plaintive cry at not finding her beside him. To a feeling of life the most vivid and intense, that weak voice had recalled her. 'For my child's sake,' she murmured in her heart, 'let strength be given me!'

Her hand was steady enough now, and she went on with the winding-up of the little clock, winding slowly, that she might have more time to think what her next move must be. She was strangely calm now, with that calmness which is induced in some natures by the presence of a great peril. As she kept on winding, her eyes seemed to be fixed intently on the little clock, but were at the same time watching the hand with a covert half-look that might or might not deceive the hidden eyes which she felt sure were just as intently watching her.

There! the clock was wound up at last—never had it taken so long a time before—and the question was, what to do next? If she could only get away—get away into her dressing-room, and put the door between herself and her hidden visitor—she felt that both she and her child would be safe. It was their only chance of escape. The effort must be made, and that at once; for to stay in the room much longer, watched by those unseen eyes, would be enough to drive her mad.

Sweet and low, sweet and low,  
Wind of the western sea.

How she contrived to get the words out she could never have told afterwards, but she found herself humming them over, and sidling across the room with an elaborately careless air, towards a little table placed half-way between the fireplace and the dressing-room door. The table was reached in safety, and Cyrylla ventured to breathe again. A photographic album lay on the table, and she took it up and began to examine it with the deepest apparent interest. While in this position, the hand was behind her. She would have given much to be able to glance over her shoulder and see whether it was still visible, but the effort was one that required more courage than she had to spare just then. Perhaps, even now, her unknown

visitor was stealing out from behind the curtain—was creeping stealthily after her with the view of surprising her, say by putting his hands over her eyes, or by seizing her suddenly round the waist! His footsteps would be noiseless on the thick carpet. She could bear the horror of her situation no longer; she let the book drop from between her fingers, and made a rush for her dressing-room; but just as she had got within a yard of the door, she stumbled, and came down on her knees. Before she could make even one effort to rise, she was grasped by the right wrist from behind, a cold hand was placed over her mouth, and a stern voice whispered in her ear: 'Make the least noise, and you are a dead woman!'

Next instant, her mouth was uncovered, and Cyrilla found herself lifted somehow on to her feet. She turned to look at her assailant, and as her eyes met his, she shrank away from him as far as the iron grasp on her wrist would allow, and gave utterance to a low cry of terror: 'Signor Pietro Fastini!'

'Even so, *carissima mia*,' he said. 'You do not seem pleased to see me. But pray resume your seat;' and still holding her by the wrist, he led her back to the easy-chair, into which he inducted her with a profound bow.

A tall and elegant-looking man, this Signor Pietro Fastini; olive-complexioned; with black beard and moustache, thin and silky; and large, dark, melancholy-looking eyes. But in those eyes there was now an expression such as Cyrilla had never seen in them before—an expression that made her shiver with affright. He was dressed in full evening-costume, except that he was without hat and gloves; while his long black hair, all blown and tangled by the night-wind, lent a touch of incongruity to his appearance, which no one could have failed to detect.

'Certainly, you do not seem pleased to see me,' he repeated, loosing his grasp of Cyrilla's wrist. 'That, however, was hardly to be expected. Let us put it that I took you too much by surprise, and not that I am an unwelcome guest.'

He gave utterance to a low, sneering laugh; then he drew up a chair close in front of Cyrilla, and sat down on it, and seemed to devour her with his large black eyes. 'Cyrilla Thornhurst,' he said, 'do you know with what purpose I am here this evening?'

Poor Cyrilla's lips formed 'No,' but no sound issued from them.

'I am here to kill you,' he said, speaking with the slightest possible foreign accent.

Cyrilla pressed her fingers to her eyes, and seemed to shrink back still further in the easy-chair. The Italian twisted the ends of his moustache, and watched her in grave silence.

'Oblige me by removing your hands from before your face,' he resumed after a pause.—'Thanks; that is better. Remember, I am here to kill, but not to torture. When the proper moment shall have come for carrying out my purpose, one brief pang will end everything.'

He spoke in solemn, unimpassioned accents, without any trace of excitement either in manner or words, and almost as though he were the minister of some stern Fate, whose behests it was his duty to carry out, without having the power to alter them, and against which there was no possible appeal.

'Do you remember when and where we parted last?' he went on. 'I know that you do, for such

occasions are never forgotten by women. For months before that day, you led me on, little by little, till at last I was foolish enough to think that I had only to ask and to have. I did ask—with what result you know as well as I. You laughed at my love, and dismissed me for ever with a foolish jest. I went away, and strove to forget you, and to a certain extent I succeeded; for at that time I was just beginning to work out the details of my Grand Scheme, and all my time and attention were needed to perfect them.—My grand scheme!' he went on, with a sudden change of tone, and an added brightness in his dark eyes. 'It would have revolutionised the world, if only the world had been wise enough to receive it. But, like all great discoverers, I am a century before the age.'

He began to pace the room rapidly, with knitted brows, and the forefinger of one hand pressed to his cheek, while his lips moved inaudibly; but always with a covert eye on Cyrilla, to see that she did not attempt to escape.

'Strange, strange!' he murmured. 'No sooner did I begin to advocate that great project, than I was set down as a madman; and because I would not forswear my ideas, they shut me up with mad people—me, me!'

He burst into a fit of laughter, loud and shrill; and then drawing from one of his pockets a small box full of those acidulated drops of which children are so fond, he placed two or three of them on his tongue, and swallowed them like so many pills; and with that, he went and resumed his seat close by Cyrilla.

'It was while I was living among the mad folk,' he went on, 'that I made the acquaintance of my friend the Mandarin, a gentleman twelve inches in height. Sometimes he would come into my room through the keyhole, sometimes down the chimney, or as often as not he would hop in at the open window, carrying his head under his arm. He used to perch himself on my table, and sit and nod at me by the hour together, and favour me with his advice on every conceivable subject. Oh, he was a most learned mandarin. It was he who persuaded me to come to this place, and kill you—and kill your husband. And I have sworn to do it! There was to be a grand party to-night at the place where I have been residing for so many months. I dressed for it, of course just to please the foolish creatures—you know what strange whims those poor crazy wretches have sometimes—and in the confusion I escaped. See! I bought this as I came along; the handle is designed after the antique, and pleased me hugely.'

As he spoke, he drew from the pocket of his dress-coat a slender-cased poniard of dull bluish steel, with a haft of bronze. Having extracted it from its case, he proceeded to wipe it carefully, almost tenderly, with his cambric handkerchief; while Cyrilla, coiled up in the easy-chair, watched his every movement with bright, quick-glancing eyes—the eyes of an animal brought to bay—that nothing escaped.

The little clock on the chimney-piece chimed the quarter before midnight.

'When that clock strikes twelve, Cyrilla Thornhurst, you will have lived your life.'

He spoke with the quiet, unhesitating conviction of tone of one who sees before a foregone conclusion, from which it is impossible that he can swerve in the slightest degree.

'What have I done to deserve so terrible a fate at your hands?' burst out Cyrilla.

'You have wrecked the happiness of my life,' said the Italian—'wrecked it utterly and irretrievably. That I might have forgiven you; but I have promised my friend the mandarin—for state reasons, which it would be a breach of confidence in me to reveal—to kill you, to kill your husband, and to kill your child. It is sufficient to state that your lives are required by the great Dog-star, whose hierophant I am. Ask me no further. The initiated would understand me at once; for there is a transcendentalism in these matters which is as the language of Fi-Fo-Fum to those whose eyes have been anointed with grease from the Great Bear. Your time in this world is reduced to ten minutes and five seconds.'

With the putting away of the poniard for a time, Cyrilla had taken her eyes off the Italian, and now sat with her chin sunk on her breast, and her hands tightly clasped, brooding over what she had just heard. To kill her husband and child! That would be a thousand times worse than death to herself. Theodore might come any minute now—come stepping jantly in through the French window, to be sprung upon by this madman, and stabbed before her eyes. 'If only I could steady my mind to think,' she kept repeating to herself. What was it she had heard and read about the peculiarities of mad people? If she could only bring it to mind!

The Italian was watching her narrowly from under his bent brows. Suddenly, with that abruptness which marked all his movements, he got up, and striding to the easel, flung back the sheet with which it was covered. He started at sight of the picture; but next moment, his poniard was out, and the canvas stabbed through in a dozen different places. 'Out! out! cursed likeness of a false-hearted fiend!' he exclaimed. 'Oh, that a soul so vile should lodge in a husk so sweet!'

If she could only bring it to mind! All at once, something seemed to catch her breath, and she pressed her hand to her heart for a moment, while a strange expression crept over her face, which subsided presently into one of her sweetest smiles. Then she half rose from the easy-chair, and turned her large soft eyes full on the young Italian. '*Pietro mio*,' she said; and there was a world of meaning in her way of saying those two little words.

The dark frown vanished like a cloud from the face of the young Italian, and the light of passion faded from his eyes when he heard himself addressed thus; and he turned on Cyrilla a look half-bewildered, half-suspicious, and felt with one hand for the hilt of his poniard. She was standing with her head a little on one side, smiling at him; and while he was looking, her rosy lips whispered 'Come!' and as if it were a command impossible for him to disobey, he came towards her—timidly, cautiously, and suspiciously, but still step by step nearer. As she sank back in the easy-chair, still with the same fixed smile on her face, her finger pointed to a low footstool a yard or two away. He understood her gesture, and pushing the footstool across the floor, he seated himself on it close by her chair. Again the same strange expression swept over her face as the sleeve of his coat touched her dress as he sat down; but the smile was back again next moment, and her voice took an accent as low and tender as that of any love-lorn Juliet when she next spoke to him.

'You naughty, naughty boy!' she said, and she pinched his ear playfully as she spoke; 'I vow you nearly frightened me to death, creeping into the room in that stealthy way, for all the world like the villain in a melodrama. How was I to know it was you that was behind the curtain? And then, when I did see you, I declare you gave my nerves quite a shock. I had heard such strange stories about your being mad, and all that, you know, so that my fright can hardly be wondered at. My poor Pietro, what you must have suffered!'

Every nerve and fibre in the Italian's body seemed to thrill under the influence of those loving words and that angelic smile; but his eyes were still full of bewilderment, and his lips moved inaudibly for several moments before he spoke. 'Why do you pity me?' he said at last. 'How can you be glad to see me, when you know that I am here to take your life?'

Cyrilla sighed. 'Can you not understand, my Pietro,' she said, 'that when life has become a burden, it does not seem such a very difficult thing to quit it?'

'Your life a burden!' he said incredulously. 'In this pretty nest, and mated with the husband of your choice, your life ought to be very precious to you, Cyrilla.'

'The opinion of the world!' said Cyrilla, with a mournful ring in her voice.—'Is there not such a thing, Pietro, as being wedded to a man with whom you have nothing in common? You have read *Locksley Hall*, and you know what I mean without my saying more. Once I had a treasure within my grasp, but not knowing its value, I threw it carelessly away.—Do you think that life to such a one can be a thing of much value?'

She turned away her face, and buried it in her handkerchief. Fastini fell on his knees before her. 'Cyrilla, Cyrilla! say that you love me,' he cried. One of her hands was lying carelessly on her lap; he seized it, and covered it with passionate kisses. She did not repulse him; she only said gently: 'You must not do that; you know that you have vowed to kill me.'

'No, no!' he cried passionately, starting to his feet. 'You shall not die! I will intercede for you with the mandarin. The Dog-star himself shall hear your story, and pity you. Some other life shall be sacrificed in place of yours: you shall live. Together, we will quit this hateful England; together, in my own sunny clime, in Italy the beautiful, we will'—

The clock on the mantel-piece chimed midnight. 'There sounds the knell of my doom!' said Cyrilla with a mournful smile.

'It is the signal that summons you to a new life—to a life of love, and freedom, and happiness!' said the Italian. 'It tells me too,' he added, 'that I have other work still left to accomplish.' He laid a finger lightly on her shoulder. 'The man who calls you wife, the child who calls you mother, they must die!'

Cyrilla's eyes confronted those of the madman steadily; not the quiver of a nerve betrayed the feelings at work within her.

Fastini began to move towards the door of the dressing-room; Cyrilla caught him by the button, and held him. He turned on her in an instant, a wild devil of fury glaring out of his eyes. 'Do you—dare—to say—that you care the least in the world about either of those two?' he snarled out. He had grasped her firmly by the shoulder with



one hand ; his other hand was behind her, and she felt the sharp point of the poniard prick through her dressing-robe into her flesh, as he asked the question.

'Care for either of them!' exclaimed Cyrilla with a contemptuous laugh. 'Why should I care for them, Pietro mio? It is not that. It is this, as regards the child: I do not think—nay, I am sure—that I could not love you so well as I do now, if I knew that you were guilty of shedding the blood of that innocent; and he at least is innocent.'

'No blood, Cyrilla,' he whispered—'only the pillow.'

'No!' said Cyrilla loftily. 'The man I love must be above a dastardly deed like that. To be the murderer of a smiling babe! Fough!—You can go, Signor Fastini,' she added coldly, stepping from before him. 'The child is asleep in yonder room. When you have killed him, come back and kill me, if you don't wish to see the unutterable contempt with which I should then look upon you!' She pointed to the open door of the dressing-room as she spoke, and drawn up to her full height, stared steadily into the lunatic's eyes. He quailed under that fixed, stern gaze; he wavered; he whispered something to himself; and then with the air of a beaten hound, he slunk up to Cyrilla, and taking her hand humbly, he lifted it to his lips, and kissed it twice.

'Your pardon, Cyrilla,' he said, 'for having misunderstood you. The child, truly, is beneath my notice. Let him live.'

'Spoken like my own Pietro,' said Cyrilla, thawing suddenly into a very May-day of love and sunshine. 'You were only jesting with me, I know.'

'But he—the man who has caused you so much misery—your husband; you will not intercede for him,' said Pietro gloomily. 'He—he above all men—must die.'

'So be it,' said Cyrilla with a little shrug of supreme indifference. Ten minutes past twelve! Theodore could not be long now. How her ears strained, how her heart beat at the slightest sound from without! If he were to come now, he could hardly escape with life, unless she, Cyrilla, were to sacrifice her own life in the endeavour to save his. She was quite prepared to do that, she said to herself.

'But pray, tell me,' she resumed aloud, 'what plan you intend to adopt for carrying out your scheme of vengeance.'

'As soon as I hear his footsteps, I shall hide behind those curtains,' said the madman. 'As he steps across the threshold, I shall rush forth, and strike him dead with my poniard.'

'A pretty scheme—a very pretty scheme!' said Cyrilla encouragingly. 'But I think I know one still better—one that will avoid all bloodshed, which is objectionable in a lady's room.'

'Tell it me,' said the Italian eagerly.

'When he comes in,' said Cyrilla, 'he will ask for a cup of coffee—he always does. Into his coffee I will put a few drops out of a certain vial which I have in my dressing-room. He drinks the coffee, and five minutes later he is a dead man!'

'Good, good!' said the madman, rubbing his hands gleefully. 'And then, when he is dead, I will cut off his head, and carry it to my friend the mandarin, and he will give me his magic ring—his cat's-eye ring, that is worth a king's ransom; and

we will sail across the seas, you and I together; and you will be mine, my own, for ever! Say, shall it not be so?'

'It shall, my Pietro!' answered Cyrilla boldly. 'Ah! you don't know how much I shall love you. But we have no time to lose: Thornhurst will be here presently, and I must hide you at once.'

'Yes—yes! behind the curtains!' said Fastini eagerly.

'No, not behind the curtains,' said Cyrilla, 'because the first thing Thornhurst will do after coming in will be to draw back the curtains, and fasten the windows. Let me consider: where will be the best place to hide you?' She paused, and, with her finger on her lips, looked round the room, as if in search of a hiding-place. Fastini was holding her other hand, and pressing it now and again to his lips.

'I have it!' she said at last. 'Nothing could be better. You shall hide yourself in this old chest; and she ran across the room, laughing gaily, and dragging the Italian after her, and flung open the lid of the old carved chest. 'It might have been put here on purpose,' she said, still laughing. 'See—you will have plenty of room; and there will be this advantage in hiding here, you will be able, yourself unseen, to witness the whole of my little drama from beginning to end—from your private box, you know. (A little pun that, is it not? I really won't let you kiss my hand any more.) You must just keep the lid open about a quarter of an inch—not more; and presently you will see Thornhurst come stepping in through one of these windows. You will see him kiss me—for the last time, you know, so you must not be angry. Then he will go round and fasten the windows; then he will yawn and stretch himself; and then he will seat himself in his easy-chair, and ask for his meerschaum and a cup of coffee. But you must not stir till you see his eyes close, and his head droop back on the chair.—And now, sir, to your hiding-place. If you love me, don't delay, for Thornhurst may be here any moment. No—not a single kiss now, but as many as you like afterwards. Why can't you tie those lanky limbs of yours into a knot? A little lower, please. So—that is better.'

She was just lowering the lid of the chest gently over him when he struck it up suddenly with his arm. 'Cyrilla,' he said, 'something whispers to me that my friend the mandarin would like me to do this deed myself. Perhaps the Dog-star'—

'Hush!' exclaimed Cyrilla with a start. 'The king of the pelicans is coming this way. I hear his footsteps. Hide—hide!' She tried to press the lid down on him as she spoke; but his suspicions, ever on the alert, were roused in an instant, and with all his strength he strove to keep himself from being shut in; but his strength was of little avail in the position in which he then was. Cyrilla flung herself bodily on to the chest, and in spite of all the madman's efforts, little by little, inch by inch, the lid came down upon him, his power to struggle against it decreasing in proportion the closer it shut him in. Suddenly he changed his position, and before he could recover himself, the lid had shut him in completely, and the same instant the iron staple in the body of the chest shot up through a slit in the lid. The moment she saw it, Cyrilla's instinct pointed out to her the only method by which Fastini could be retained a prisoner, for her bodily strength was all but exhausted. The iron bar that should have passed

through the hole in the staple, and have kept the chest fast shut, was broken away, and all that Cyrilla could now do was to push her thumb through the staple, and use it as the bar had been used.

The footsteps on the gravel outside were coming nearer; and presently, Theodore Thornhurst, cigar in mouth, and with a merrier twinkle than usual in his eye, stepped in through one of the French windows.

Not one moment too soon. 'Saved! saved!' cried Cyrilla as her eyes met those of her husband, and then she sank fainting by the side of the chest. The painter was a cautious man as well as a brave one; he heard strange noises proceeding from the interior of the chest, and at the moment of releasing Cyrilla's poor bruised thumb, he slipped his pocket-knife into its place. Then lifting his wife in his arms, he carried her into another room, and summoned the servants to her assistance. Armed with a revolver, he then went back to the chest, and lifted up the lid; but Fastini was half-suffocated by this time, and was dragged out by Thornhurst more dead than alive.

Ultimately, the Italian was reconsigned to the place from which he had escaped; but a long time passed before the painter's wife recovered thoroughly from the effects of that terrible hour.

#### SECRET WRITING.

THERE are few persons who read the advertisements in our daily papers who have not been often puzzled by seeing, in the second column of the *Times*, some such mysterious announcement as the following: 6 10 18 16 17—16, 2, 2—22 12 18—17, 12, 1, 24, 22, &c.; or, oggv og cv ejctkpi etquu. To those who have never given their attention to methods of secret writing, such an enigma as that presented by either of the examples given above, is too difficult and mysterious to be even thought of in any way but as a paradox. When, however, we have gone carefully into this matter, we find that it is usually a mere matter of time solving these problems, they being never utterly insoluble. It is surprising to find, very often, how little skill has been displayed in forming the hieroglyphics that are expected to defeat the curiosity of those who may feel disposed to inquire what there is hidden in these mysterious numbers. In time of war, when most important communications are transmitted from one officer to another, and when great disasters might result if an enemy were to become acquainted with the information contained in these communications, considerable care is taken to adopt what are called 'cipher' communications, of such a nature as to be of no use to any one except to him who possesses the key. To construct or arrange a method of writing which is excessively difficult to unravel, is not a very arduous undertaking; there are numerous methods by which this can be accomplished, and that method may be considered the best which occupies the longest time to find out; but as we before remarked, to arrange a means of communication which cannot be discovered, is almost impossible. In order to be an accomplished 'expert' at

solving hieroglyphics, we ought to be well acquainted with the construction of various languages, and to know the peculiarities of each. Let us take an example from English and French, languages generally known, and deal with the peculiarities of these. In English, there are three words of only one letter—namely, a, I, and O, the last very seldom used, but the former two are of very frequent occurrence. In French, we only know of a and d', used as a verb, or as a prefix to an article or pronoun. In both languages, the vowels are used oftener than any other letters; and in English, especially, we have the letter e more frequently repeated than any other; next comes a; then o.

By examining any long sentence or series of sentences, we can then at once almost fix upon these two letters, and thus obtain a key to the principles adopted. Then we can look out for words of three letters which are either terminated or begun by one of these, and we may then conclude that the word ending in e is 'the,' that beginning with a is 'and;' we then have a guess at the letters t, h, n, and d; and we can try, by substituting these letters for the signs, numbers, &c. in the hieroglyphics, whether we are on the true track. In, an, at, if, it, is, be, or, we, on, as, by, of, to, do, are all common words of two letters that are ever recurring; thus, when we find a repetition of two signs or numbers, we may attack these first, and thus obtain a probable meaning for each sign. Thus first taking single letters, then double, we begin with a few, and then increase our stock as we go on. In the case of figures, we may first try whether certain figures do not stand in place of certain letters, using in our trials the most simple forms first, the more complex afterwards, and thus, by the exhaustive process, hunt down the method used. Let us adopt this plan with the first numeral hieroglyphics given in the commencement of this paper. Let us assume, first, that it is the English language used, and we then find that either a or I ought to be represented by 6. In the first place, we will try whether the very simplest form has been adopted to blind us—namely, to number the letters of the alphabet, and then, instead of writing letters, put numbers to form words. We will first take these in order, and assuming 6 to represent a, we should have e represented by 10, m by 18, k by 16, and l by 17; and 6, 10, 18, 16, 17, would be aemkl, out of which no sense would be apparent. Before resigning this plan, however, we will suppose that 6 represents I; then taking the alphabet in order, we should have 10, 18, 16, 17 representing m, u, s, t, and the sentence seems to commence 'I must.' We next have 16, 2, 2. Now, 16 is s, and 2, 2, the same letter repeated, suggests at once double e. We have then, 'I must see.' In the next word, 22, 12, 18, we have the last letter u, represented by 18; and 'I must see you' is at once suggested—22 and 12 meaning y and o respectively. The next word is 17, 12, 1, 24, 22, of which we have thus much, tol, 24, y. Comparing this with the previous portion of the sentence, we are at once led to

'to-day' as the word, and the whole sentence therefore is, 'I must see you to-day.' Upon writing down these numbers under the letters, we shall find that the plan adopted was to commence numbering the alphabet at D for I, and so on to the end; then putting the numeral under each letter, instead of the letter itself, the sentence was formed, and no doubt was considered very complicated by the lady or gentleman whose wants were thus expressed in mystic language.

This is a very simple case of hieroglyphics, and one which is only likely to be puzzling in consequence of its brevity. The next specimen we have given is also very simple; but this case comes at once under the head of the beginner's alphabet, for the two g's in the centre of the word, and the g terminating the word of two letters, at once directs us either to 'good' or 'meet.' Good is the least likely word with which to commence a sentence; but if we take o as g, and g as o, we have 'good go' for the first two words. If, however, we take g as e, then we have 'meet me' for the first two words, and t for the termination of the third word, which would therefore most probably be either 'it' or 'at.' The last word of these five ends with a double letter, and this would most probably be double l; and 'shall' is the word at once suggested to us; but shall is an unlikely word with which to finish a sentence, and we are, by the beginning of the sentence, induced to look for the name of a place at which an appointment is to take place, and thus we search for another word ending in a double letter, and are at once reminded of cross, five letters ending in double letters. If our guess be correct, then e means c, t means r, q means o, and u means s. 'Meet me at *cjarkpi* cross' is now the sentence, the italics indicating the unknown letters. A very little imagination at once leads us to the supposition that 'Charing' is the word indicated; and thus 'oggv og cv ejctkpi etquu' is nothing more than 'Meet me at Charing Cross.' By substituting the false letters under an alphabet, we find that the plan adopted in this case was to write e under a, and then to continue in succession until the alphabet was used up; a not very complicated system to adopt. In this case, we worked out the problem from starting on the conviction, that e was the most common letter, and that the language was English; but in so short a sentence, such a test might be fallacious, for the shorter a sentence, the less clue is there given to the examiner on which he can work; and the repetition of the e in small sentences may by chance be avoided. 'Go on with my work' was a sentence in numerals that puzzled us for a short time; three o's in five words induced us to believe that this letter was an e, until we discovered our obtuseness in not at once discovering that e rarely ever in English begins a word of two letters; and thus, as it was most probably a vowel, it must be either a, i, or o; and as a and i rarely finish a word of two letters, ma and pa being the exceptions, and i never being used, we were at once brought to o; then 'to of,' 'do of or on,' 'go of or on,' &c. were the probable meaning of these words, and we therefore selected 'go on' as probable. Then came a word of four letters with o in the second place; this might be word, work, hold, &c. We selected 'work,' and thus guessed at w, which led us to 'with.' Then the 'my' became a natural inference; and we had from this one sentence twelve letters as highly probable; and these letters applied to the remaining sentences imme-

diately solved the mysteries of the cipher communication.

The fact that e predominates most in English, and afterwards a, o, i, in order, and that there is no word without a vowel, gives us at once a clue not only to every arrangement of numbers to represent letters, but to any system of ciphers used for secret writing. Then, again, a vowel, and therefore e, a, o, i, or u, almost invariably begins a word, or occupies the second place in a word; the exceptions being when an h, l, p, r, t, or w are used: there are very few words which will not come under these exceptions.

Let us examine the last hundred words preceding this paragraph, beginning at the last sentence ending 'exceptions'; the hundred words reach to 'and.' We find seventy-two words either begin with a vowel or have a vowel in the second place, and no less than fifteen words where the vowel is preceded by h, in the second place. There are seventy-eight e's; whilst of the next vowel (a) there are only thirty-two; there being also thirty-two o's, and twenty-nine i's. About the e, there could be no mistake, its number at once revealing it, whether it happened to be represented by a cross, a dot, a numeral, or anything else. To distinguish the a from the o, we must remember that o is frequently the termination of a word of two letters, such as to, go, no, do, so; whilst a is more seldom used in this way, but is more often used to commence words of two or three letters, 'an' 'and' being very common; so that we can first decide upon our probable vowels, and then select the vowels themselves. The fact of the predominance of e is a great key, for there are many words in which double e occurs, and also words of four and five letters in which there are two e's—such as 'deep,' 'seen,' 'keep,' 'been,' 'sleep,' 'meet,' &c.; and also 'were,' 'where,' 'there,' 'here,' all of which may be at once selected and tried, in order to discover h, r, w, t, and other letters which are used with these. Thus we should find there were very few words which would not be considerably broken up by this process, and leave us but little for guess-work, or much choice for option as regards our word.

Among the consonants, d and h are the most common, then n, s, r, t; so that after we have failed, by the aid of e, a, o, i, to discover words, we can recount and ascertain which sign is most likely to represent h or d. Again, when we have guessed at an o, we may examine for a word of three letters, and with o in the centre; this let us guess to be 'you;' then we may try whether by substituting y and u in various words where they occur, we obtain satisfactory results. We will now take a simple case of substitution, by which the principles of discovery mentioned may be practised, and from this we will advance to more complicated problems; but in each there is the same means open to discover the vowels and the most prominent letters. Here is a communication: 2873 j8 73 1j 8g 235 17 b135g4 c8i 1 1054dj 8c 13,811 733j 73 5c 13811 21gj 2873. In this sentence, there are seven 3's, eight 8's, six 7's, three 13's, five j's, three 2's, three c's, four 5's, four 1's, &c. The greatest number of any here is 8, but we are disinclined to accept this as representing e, on account of 8 c appearing; and thus we take 8 to represent o, and 8 c would be either on, of, or. Then we come to the seven 3's, a number which we at once select as representing e,

and 7 3 3 j may be seen, keep, or meet, &c.; but 7 3 immediately following, leads us to accept 7 3 3 j as meet, 7 3 as me—j is therefore t; 7, e; and 8, o. By substituting these letters in the first word, it stands thus, 2ome, which may be either come or some; the next word being 'to' (j 8), come is the more likely of the two; thus, 'come to me' are the first three words. 7 being m, 1, 7 can be only am; thus, 1 being a, 1 j becomes 'at.' Then 8 g 2 3 becomes, from our previous knowledge, ogce, and g is therefore n. 5 can only be i, to make sense; and we next find b 13 5 g 4, of which we know 5 and g. 13 we may guess at from 13 8 11, which is most probably you. Thus we may write, byin4, which may be dying or lying, but dying seems the more probable, from the I am before it. c 8 i must be 'for'; 1 is a; 10 5 4 d j becomes 10igdt; and sight is the word suggested, with ig in the middle, and t at the end. 'Meet me if you can't come,' is the remainder of the sentence—not by any means a complex arrangement; the plan adopted having been to write l under a, a under b, 2 under c, b under d, and so on, and then spelling out the letters in order.

A much more complicated system is that of which the following is a specimen: 'pqrō vn'pq'km ro j'kp nj'ou p'qn'nn knrjp v'k'nn l'kv'lurlj'prk'j jk'k'qp rp.

It is at once evident, from looking at this, that very few letters are used, and thus that each letter must have a double meaning. First, we find there are a multitude of dots, too numerous to mean any one letter, therefore these must indicate something else, probably when one letter means differently from the same letter without the dot. Next we find there are eight p's, four q's, three v's, six j's, eight n's, eight k's, six r's, three o's, three l's, &c. We are at once induced by the number of n's to put this letter down as the representative of e, more especially as we find in the sixth word two n's without dots in it. There is also no word which has not in it either j, n, r, k, or q, and therefore we will select these as the probable vowels, especially when we find that out of eleven words one or other of these letters occupy the first or second positions.

Starting on the supposition that n is meant for e, we will attack the word 'pqn'nn, which might be 'where,' or 'there.' If we take where as the word, then p means w, and we have a single word of two letters, rp, and no word of two letters ends in w. If, however, we take it to mean 'there,' then rp might be 'it'; and we at once guess at t, h, r, and i. Assuming these letters to have been correctly guessed, we have the first word, 'pqrō, standing thio, and 'this' is at once the word suggested, 'o' being the representation of s; and this will hold good for the word ro, which becomes 'is.' We next come to j'kp, a word of three letters, preceded by 'is,' and terminated by t, and 'not' is at once presented to us as highly probable; and j and 'k' are n and o; v'k'nn then becomes vore, and v must be b or m, m being the more probable. Next, we may select vn'pq'km, in which we may substitute the letters already known as follows, methom, and m should therefore be d. Another word, knrjp becomes, by substituting known letters, keinp, and 'being' is a very likely word to come from this, k and p being b and g respectively.

Out of our selected vowels j, n, r, k, and q, we know n is e, r is i, k is o; j and q are therefore a and u. We don't know which represents a, how-

ever, until we find the word jk-k'qp, which, from what we know of k-k'p, becomes jbo'qt. If, now, we suppose j is u, and 'q, a, this word becomes uboat; but if j be a, and 'q, u, then 'about' is the word.

We will now attack the long word l'kv'lurlj'prk'j, and this, from what we know, becomes lom'lulation. Here are two l's without a dot; most probably, therefore, the same letter is meant. Beginning at the commencement of the alphabet, we may try bom and bation, which seems unsatisfactory. The next letter, com, cation, only requires pl to be added to make sense, and complication is the word. Thus, the whole sentence is solved, for nj'ou is by the three known letters n, j, and o, as well as by the context, shewn to be 'easy,' and the meaning becomes—'This method is not easy, there being more complication about it.'

We have thus shewn how, by the exhaustive process, by speculating as to the vowels, counting the letters, and by trial, we may solve almost any method which can be constructed for secret writing, although the systems for complications may be so arranged as to be very puzzling. By another method than any yet mentioned, however, we can manage to communicate in a manner which may fairly be said to defy detection. It is as follows: Two persons procure each a dictionary similar in every particular.\* This dictionary may be artificially paged, so that page 90 is marked page 1, and so on; then the word meant is counted either from the top or the bottom of the page, and numbered accordingly; thus (97, 6), would mean 97th page of the book, and the sixth word down. In order, again, to avoid detection, it might be agreed upon, that if the date of the communication were given, the reader should count on 10, 15, &c. pages before he numbered page 1 in his dictionary—this extra variation rendering discovery very improbable.

In the olden time, when postage was very expensive, much ingenuity was adopted to cheat the Post-master-general—writing in milk, with a lemon, and in other ways which were invisible, until submitted to a great heat. Another very simple plan was to dot under each letter in the leading article or police report, and thus mark out words and sentences, the stops being indicated by a short line instead of a dot; and thus many communications were passed between lovers or friends who were too poor to pay the then high rate of postage, or with whom there were obstacles in the way of communication.

Referring, again, to the mere cipher problem, we will submit one which for a very long time defeated us; it was as follows: owew emtn gate itnia enll ewtx ofke htr ere otinosa uoydl. Upon counting the letters, we found 8 e's, 5 o's, 3 i's, 3 a's, 6 t's, 3 w's, 3 l's, &c.

Taking e to mean really e, in consequence of the preponderance of e's, we were at once defeated by ere; neither would c do for o, nor for any single letter: htr again puzzled us, for if t, as seemed probable, were a vowel, we knew of but few likely words with a vowel in the middle of these letters, except that vowel were u or o; and these would not suit.

After an endless variation of trials and failures, we always came back to the uoydl, and we were attracted to this because uoy is you backwards. We seemed, however, to be no nearer the mark than we were, even with the aid of uoy; but we

\* See *A Private Inquiry*, Chambers's Journal (No. 118).



determined to turn the words round, when the sentence stood thus: wewo ntime etag ainti lline xtwe ekfo rth ere asonito ldyou. This was very little more intelligible than the former wording, with the exception of the word you, to which we were still attracted. The you, however, left ld unaccounted for, and this *might* give us a key. It did do so, for ld belonged, we guessed, to *to* of the former sentence, and 'told you' became apparent. No sooner had we reached this point than the mystery was solved; two letters of the following word were attached to that preceding it; making simply this alteration, the sentence was intelligible as follows: 'We won't meet again till next week, for the reason I told you.'

The arrangement was marvellously simple, and yet effective.

A most difficult arrangement to solve is the following. Write down the alphabet A B C, &c.; then under each letter write other letters of the alphabet three or four deep; thus—

A	B	C	D
o	p	q	r
j	k	m	l
s	r	t	v

Then, when a message is to be sent, shew by the first four or five words, according as is arranged previously, from which of these columns the respective words are used; the order of the letters in the first few words shewing the order of the changes. Thus, klmn, jlki, &c., would indicate that the first word was made from the first row of letters below A B C, &c.; the second word from the second row; the third from the third; and the fourth from the fourth; klm following in proper order. Then the next word, jlki, shews that the fifth word was taken from the second row; the sixth from the fourth, because l comes before k; the seventh from the third, because k is third in order; and the eighth word from the first row again. This method avoids the repetition of vowels, and, when skilfully drawn out, almost defies solution. Here is a specimen: L'M'N mnl nlm : tlth thw qlqd qx ewmbb qt fdgu je nbxx.

To solve this, write first the common alphabet; then under a write p, and under each subsequent letter write q, r, s, &c. in order, omitting L, and call this column l. Then under a, again, and below p, commence with t, and write the alphabet; call this column m; again, under t commence with m, and write a third alphabet. The commencement of the sentence, L'M'N mnl, &c. shews that the first word is formed from column l, the second from M, the third from N, the fourth from m, the fifth from n, and the sixth from l. If this arrangement will be tried, it will be found that the message is this: 'Ever and ever we shall be true to thee;' a sentence of nine words with no less than nine e's in it; and yet by this arrangement the excess of this letter is not shewn, the letters t, x, and q respectively meaning e in columns L'M'N.

Here, then, is a means by which the ardent lover may communicate with his loved one in safety, the patriot with his fellow-patriot, and the anxious merchant with his companion; but all such persons should beware, for the trial may be hit off by an 'expert;' and the slightest footprint will give a clue, and cause the vast mystery to be unravelled, and read as easily as common writing. There is, however, a considerable amount of skill to be shewn in the formation of a secret code, and still more in the unravelling of the same; and thus

to the mere investigator or lover of paradoxes, secret writing and hieroglyphics may not be without interest.

## LORD ULSWATER.

### CHAPTER IX.—BAFFLED.

MR MARSH, member of the College of Surgeons, sat upon the edge of his chair, squeezing his hat between his bony arm and his lean body, as wiry, pallid, and unwholesome a medical practitioner as could be readily found. His dark eyes were restless and bloodshot; there were scars upon his pointed chin, that shewed how the razor had trembled in his hand when he shaved away his harsh blue beard; the hands themselves, in their new gloves of dark-green kid, were very unsteady and unquiet. A fine perfume of rum, qualified by the odour of drugs, hung about Mr Marsh and his habiliments. He was rather shabby, but carefully dressed, with a neckcloth elaborately arranged, with clean wristbands, and a well-brushed hat. His mouth expressed much ill-humour, it is true, his features were mean, and his rough hair had the appearance of having been dipped in a dyer's vat, it was so very coarse and so very black; but he had a shrewd look, too, and a good frontal development, battered and dilapidated as he was. A knave he might be, but no fool.

Yet he sat there, eyeing Lord Ulswater from under his shaggy brows, and blinking owlishly, without speaking. The master of the house had to begin the conversation. 'You wish to speak with me, Mr Marsh. We have not met for some time. I cannot guess the object of your visit,' said Lord Ulswater gravely.

Mr Marsh broke out into a crowing laugh, quite unexpectedly, and wagged his head from side to side, as he made answer: 'O yes, you can, my Lord—yes, you can. Don't tell me. You know you know it!' And he let his hat drop upon the carpet with a dull thud, and passed his gloved fingers through his ragged dark hair, and repeated the crowing laugh. He had been drinking, to brace up his nerves for the interview, long anticipated, and the liquor had mounted suddenly to his brain, and had disposed him to be insolent and defiant.

Lord Ulswater's voice was serious and almost sad as he bent forward and said: 'Marsh, I am sorry for this—a man of your ability, and your learning and experience—I really am sorry for this. It is a bad habit.'

While speaking thus, in a slow, impressive way, Lord Ulswater made an effort to catch the man's eye, and at last he succeeded. The visitor, when once his own shifting black eyes were confronted with the steady blue eyes of Lord Ulswater, could not withdraw them, and he winced and moved awkwardly in his chair, and presently covered his face with his hands, and began to cry. 'It is a bad habit; you're quite right, my Lord. I ask pardon. I'm a wretched, broken man, and my whole comfort is in drink, though it is killing me, killing me.' The last words were uttered in a sort of whining voice, that would rather have seemed to befit the throat of a scourged hound, than of any creature in human shape, though never so degraded and sunken in the great Dismal Swamp of Drink. The attitude of the man, as well as his tone, was miserably abject, as he sat crouching, with his

face hidden between his tremulous hands. But Lord Ulswater's face, though it was eloquent with the scorn he cared not to conceal, shewed none of the confidence that springs from contempt. He knew how readily the tears rise to the eyes of a drunkard, and he knew, too, how quickly the unstable moods of drunkards are apt to change, from maudlin penitence to brutal fury, or dull apathy, or noisy boastfulness. In this instance, however, there was no abrupt transition, but Mr Marsh slowly allowed his hands to drop upon his knees, drew himself up, and sat silent for a little while, evidently busy in disentangling the ravelled clue of his ideas. His eyes gradually became less restless, and the quivering of his lean fingers almost wholly ceased. The astute brains of the man, sorely bemuddled by intemperance, were not yet irreparably sunk in the fiery Lethe of the spirit-bottle, and an effort of their owner's will could still clear them upon occasion, though with great and increasing difficulty. He looked and spoke well-nigh like a sober person, as he resumed the broken conversation.

'My Lord,' said Mr Marsh, 'I owe an apology to you for my late conduct. I have had much to vex and trouble me lately, and have been far from well, and—and have been injudicious in the over-free use of stimulants. I am indebted for so much to your Lordship's generous patronage, that it is painful to me to appear before you, my benefactor, in such a light as I fear I have done. I beg of you, Lord Ulswater, to believe that my presence here this day is unconnected with any intentional disrespect.'

'You mean well, Marsh, I am sure,' said Lord Ulswater quietly. 'You have not yet told me, though, what you do mean; and I cannot guess your exact drift.'

'I will explain my purpose, with your Lordship's leave,' returned the surgeon, while a sickly smile flitted over his face for an instant. 'I should be singularly ungrateful if I did not remember that it was by your liberality that I was enabled to give up my humble post as assistant to Dr Dennis, and set up for myself at Shelton-on-Sea, the inhabitants of which, I must say, are a pack of the most narrow-minded provincial curs that ever'—

'They don't appreciate you, Marsh, eh? That is your meaning, I conclude?' interrupted Lord Ulswater, with a slight but expressive gesture of weariness.

Mr Marsh writhed deferentially, and moved his ugly head like a serpent dancing to the flute of the snake-charmer. Then, little by little, his grievances were revealed. He had taken an expensive house, in the dearest quarter of the watering-place, had furnished it, partly on credit, and had married, fully trusting that his unquestioned ability and his social tact would secure for him the lion's share of the practice, hitherto enjoyed by his old employer, Dr Dennis. Mr Marsh, however, had to learn by sad experience that patients look for character as well as for talent in their medical man, and that sentiment enters largely into the relations of mankind towards each other. The town was up in arms from the first on account of the new doctor's reputed ingratitude to good, easy-going old Dennis, and, once prepared to dislike Mr Marsh, their antipathy was not suffered to die out for lack of fuel. The Upper Ten Dozen of Shelton speedily found out that the obnoxious doctor drank; that he was a bad paymaster; that he went

to church certainly, but for their *beaux yeux* alone, and because it is respectable to go to church, and that he was in the habit of descanting irreverently upon solemn subjects when among choice spirits in the parlour of the *Red Lion*. There was more than this that was whispered to the doctor's detriment—vague discreditable reports, that nobody could trace to any definite source, but which, like the Eumenides, tracked down their victim from afar, and which easily convinced a prejudiced audience that Mr Marsh was a dangerous person, unfit for family practice.

The surgeon married; but even that meritorious act was made by his evil stars to serve as a means for plunging his reputation still deeper in the slough of scandal. He married the daughter of a gentleman-farmer in the county, an empty-headed, rosy-cheeked young woman, with a strong taste for fine clothes and idleness, a half-educated, shallow-eyed lass, whom it would have taken the best of husbands to have converted into even a tolerable wife. Mr Marsh was not a good husband; extravagance and folly on the one side, intemperance and irritability on the other, produced their natural result in a plenteous crop of quarrels, in tears, oaths, shrewishness, abuse, hysterics, blows. It was no secret in Shelton that Mr Marsh often beat his wife. He had indeed been once admonished by the magistrates sitting in petty sessions at the *Regent Hotel*, and had been bound over in recognisances to keep the peace towards his Mary Ann. Rough music had been played at night under his windows; the street-boys jeered him as he went by; his few paying patients fell off; he lost sundry pounds annually by his parish appointment; his credit sank to zero, and those to whom he owed money sued him in the County Court. His sole practice was among the poor, to whom he administered drugs and advice gratis, not that he cared any more for the poor than Judas did, but because even unpaid employment was less disgraceful, in a professional point of view, than absolute inaction.

In all this modern version of a medical Rake's Progress down the black road to ruin, there was nothing very extraordinary; the wonder was rather in the patience with which Lord Ulswater listened to its details. He was much kinder and less proud in his bearing than he had been towards the thieves' attorney, and yet Mr Marsh was a more repulsive personage than Mr Moss. When the surgeon had finished his tale, Lord Ulswater paused for a moment, and then rejoined: 'Now, Marsh, I knew from the first that this plan of yours would not answer any good end. Recollect, that when I undertook to do something for you, I by no means approved of that Shelton project. It was not a hopeful scheme. The practice was limited, and'—

'Ah! but I wanted to cut out old Dennis, the stupid old prig, with his fossil notions and his slow mind; and Mrs D., too, with her high and mighty patronage of her betters; and the daughters, who turned up their conceited noses at the poor shabby assistant's old coat—I owed them all a grudge, and I wanted to shew them the sort of stuff I was made of!' broke out Mr Marsh, with a sudden flaming up of the envious malignity that lay dormant within him, and he clenched his bony fist and shook it stealthily at some imaginary offender.

Lord Ulswater frowned, and his tone was cold, and almost severe as he made answer: 'You told me nothing of this at the time, and, had you done so, I should have proved less compliant. But I thought,

and I see that I thought rightly, that you would do far better abroad.'

Mr Marsh had lost sight of his penitence by this time, and he was rapidly getting rid of his humility. 'Abroad, my Lord? Yes, yes, I should think so; and the further the better, eh? America was the country for a pushing medical practitioner, in your Lordship's opinion, I remember. South America better still than North; he! he! Mexico, California, Pike's Peak, Gippsland, best of all, I should say. Some nice snug place on the other side of the world, with plenty of snakes, sickness, and cut-throat company, plenty of liquor going too, and no intellectual associates—just the place for a man of education to drink himself into the next world. Aha! my Lord! I'm obliged all the same.' And the wretch actually snapped his fingers, and grinned wolfishly.

Lord Ulswater's face became very white, but not with fear. 'Idiot!' he said, with a quick, involuntary glance at the window nearest him—'idiot, to insult me, and to do so *here*!' And he made a slight movement as he spoke—such a movement as the lion makes before he bounds upon the narrowing ring of spears that hem him in closer and closer at every step of the hunters.

Mr Marsh also glanced at the window, like a picture framed in the thick wall of the tower. It was open; the soft sea-breeze stole gently in, and with the breeze the low wash of the gurgling sea among the boulders at the cliff-foot. Without, nothing could be seen but a lazy white cloud floating in the blue, save when a gull's wing flapped swiftly past the casement. The window overlooked the sheer descent of the precipice—that was a mere picturesque accident in the construction of St Pagans, but—but Mr Marsh read something in Lord Ulswater's face that made his own pseudo-courage wane as fast as that of Bob Acres himself.

'I beg pardon. On my soul, my Lord, I crave you to excuse me,' he faltered out.

Lord Ulswater kept his eyes firmly upon the cowering creature, as a beast-tamer watches some brute at once treacherous and cowardly. 'We have been together now for some time,' he said gravely, 'and Lady Harriet will wonder at the length of an interview that seems without motive. You should not have come here; but as you have done so, be good enough to state your business in as few words as you can.'

'It's all up with me at Shellton; I don't make as much as would buy the corks of my physic-bottles. There'll be an execution in my house next week,' said Mr Marsh. 'I want to get away.'

'You want to get away? Where do you mean to go?' demanded Lord Ulswater.

'To London.—You stare, my Lord, but why not? You know as well as I know that I'm not a bad doctor. I could take out my diploma of M.D. to-morrow from the German university where I studied. I could feel pulses, and look solemn, and whisk from door to door in my brougham, and tell the newest scandal to dowagers, just as well as many a fashionable physician I could name. I'd pitch the brandy-bottle out of window—indeed, indeed I would, and live like a respectable man, and'—

'And die a court-physician, and a baronet to boot, I suppose,' said Lord Ulswater very quietly; 'but broughams, and Belgravian houses, and men-servants, and the rest of it, cost money. A good

West-end practice costs a great deal of money, I have heard. How shall you manage to get all these things?'

'For that, I look to you, my Lord,' said Mr Marsh, with a sort of dogged resolution, and repeating each word in the manner of one who is going through a lesson learned by rote. 'I have no hope in anything but the generosity of the kind patron who has given me one start in life already. He was Mr Carnac then, not my Lord, and the six hundred and odd pounds I had from him were more to him, in proportion, than six thousand would be now. Not that I want so much as a gift; it's only a loan, my Lord. I'll sign any bond you please, and pay back the money, interest and principal, out of my fees. I should do well in London, really I should. I've always hankered after London. You've only seen me under a cloud, my Lord, and you don't know what I should be with a fair field to shew my talents in. I should'—

'You must not run on in this way, Marsh,' said Lord Ulswater, rising from his seat. 'I am sorry to dash your Alnaschar-like hopes to the ground, but it is best to encourage no idle dreams. It does not suit my views that you should become Sir Stephen Marsh, M.D. of Mayfair; and most certainly I shall not lend you six thousand pounds.'

It is possible that Mr Marsh had anticipated this refusal, for he evinced none of the ordinary signs of disappointment; he sat quite still, with his gloved hands thrust deep down in his pockets, screwing up his thin-lipped mouth, and eyeing the pattern of the carpet as though he desired to count the threads. 'When a man's driven, and goaded, and harassed, there's no saying what he'll do,' observed Mr Marsh, not menacingly, but rather like one who enunciates a dreary truth—'no saying what he'll do. As well quarry stone on Dartmoor, or pick oakum at Bermuda, as lead this dog's life of skulking and dishonour. And when a man's desperate, he is not always very particular, my Lord, about who gets dragged down to ruin along with him. That's all I have to say.'

'I am glad of that, Marsh—glad, I mean, that you have finished your statement,' said Lord Ulswater, as he rang the bell. 'I shall say nothing in answer to it at present. The London project is out of the question. If you, on thinking the matter over, decide to emigrate, I may be induced, perhaps, to give you one more chance in a new part of the world. When you see the affair in a proper light, you may address me by letter—till then, good-morning, Mr Marsh,' for the butler had now appeared; and under his custody, so to speak, Mr Marsh was led away, and safely bestowed in his fly. He heard the gates of St Pagans close behind him with a dull and heavy clang. He drove back across the smooth green downs, baffled, beaten, and submissive, yet resentful, like a fierce beast that has found its master, yet snarls even as it crouches, and on the first advantage, is ready to turn upon that master, and rend him limb from limb.

#### CHAPTER X.—SHELLTON MANOR.

The Right Honourable Robert Drummond Eliot Hastings, a member of the House of Commons, and of the ministry of the day, was not the man to have his house empty. In London, things were different. Mr and Mrs Hastings had a good house in Eaton Square, to which they would not have asked any stranger, be he never so strange to town, and of

blood so near akin ; but in the country, it was the visitor whose presence conferred a favour, and guests were welcome. Shellton Manor was by no means one of those grand houses where a week's stay is a seven days' Elysium. My Lord Duke can do what Mr Eliot, with all his parliamentary, official, and social repute, could not do. When you visit his Grace, you may take your share in the bird-murder of three or four tremendous battues, at which you grow to feel a very butcher among the pheasants, and slay and slay till your shoulder aches with the kicking of the guns that the obsequious keepers load for you. Then the coursing, the amateur theatricals, the ball, the Volunteer fete, the archery, billiards, picnic, rob you of your hours right pleasantly ; and there is the noble library to steal any spare time that the gaieties of the day may have spared ; but at Shellton Manor it was not so.

Shellton, old as the house itself may have been, was a new place, a made place, one of those mansions around which the fir-trees were all young slips, the gravel too new, the hedges too trim, the meadows too carefully looked to. The demesne was not old enough to have attained to those delightful old faults of slovenly copses, patches of rough wood, sheltering rabbits, and bits of rushy ground, fit to harbour snipes, that give half their charm to the home-farm of an ordinary squire. Then the gardens, had Sir Joseph himself been their manager, could not have been expected to be as rich in leaf and flower, in blossom and fruit, as the more comfortable inland gardens out of reach of the salt breeze of the sea-coast. Mr Hastings, though he was liberal, and even lavish, with respect to what he called his preserves, could not offer to young men any shooting that of itself would be an inducement to sojourn at Shellton. An average country gentleman, dwelling within a fifty-miles' radius of the great Babel, is apt to compute that every pheasant costs him, in barley, watchers, keepers, and abatement of rent, a guinea. But it was pretty well known that the birds of the Right Honourable Robert cost him a great deal more than a guinea for every long-tailed flutterer that was laid bleeding on the grass ; and accordingly, considerate guests were chary of slaughtering too many of the Shellton pheasants, as they would have been reluctant to drink too deeply of some costly cabinet wine, ruinous to the owner.

But still, though there was lacking the quasi-feudal state and splendour of some ducal castles and some baronial mansions, though in large-handed hospitality it was surpassed by the plain red-brick Hall of many an untitled country gentleman, still Shellton Manor was rarely without guests ; and it was held an honour to be asked there. The perfume of office, the mystic odour of power, privilege, patronage, hung about the place. Young men, quite eligible on the score of birth, dress, and culture, to be Fellows of All Souls College, were eager for an invitation to that gray stone house, where bachelor inmates slept in attics and turret chambers, where the cook was a dull copyist, the stables meagrely supplied, and the host at once cross and pompous. There were pleasanter mansions strewn broadcast over Britain ; but there were only some half-dozen houses which, like Shellton Manor, were haunted by the brownie of place and power.

It may be added, that there were not many English homes in which it was possible to have

the privilege—for a privilege it was—of being domiciled under the same roof with so beautiful a girl as Flora Hastings. Those who spent, it may be, but a poor three days at Shellton, were yet able to regard themselves, and to be regarded by others, as enviable mortals and persons of distinction, on the strength of this brief proximity to the Right Honourable Robert's lovely daughter. A young dandy of the third or fourth degree of magnitude often swelled into a star of the first order, temporarily, from being able to talk with studiously careless familiarity of 'Miss Hastings—pretty Flora Hastings—most beautiful creature in England—know her people quite well—staying there, at Shellton, last August!' For London had agreed that Flora Hastings was chief belle of her second London season.

The girl was really of a rare beauty, one of those sweet, graceful maidens who form the component parts of the Dream of Fair Women. It was difficult to imagine the existence of such as Flora Hastings apart from the accessories of her life, away from pretty rooms, rich furniture, elegant trifles, and a life of ease and chastened luxury. There are styles of beauty which, like hardly garden-flowers, can thrive at the door of a cottage as well as in the sheltered precincts of abundance. There are yet other styles of beauty that seem to flourish the more vigorously beneath the low roof of the gipsy tent, or beside the camp-fire of the savage, as the harebell is never so fair, and the wild strawberry never so coyly tempting, as far away among the wood and the moorland. But Miss Hastings was more like a hothouse flower, that might, perhaps, have its native home in some sun-kissed island of the tropics, but that needed care in our rougher regions, to keep its dainty petals and glossy stem from nipping frost and rude gale.

It was some praise, and just praise, when those who were learned in such matters said, that of the two or three reigning belles of the hot, hard, grinding season, Flora Hastings was the only one that was not spoiled by the honours that polite London had chosen to thrust upon her. She had come down to Shellton with a good grace, and that good feeling of which a good grace is merely the varnish or counterfeit, in the very glow and triumph of her success. It was as if some conqueror of the grand man-slaying days of heathen Rome had been stopped in his pageant, checked on his way through shouting myriads towards the Capitol, and bidden to leave the laurels and the high chariot, the pomp and the pride of the hour, to carry out some homely mission of common-place, every-day duty. To go down to Shellton, while London was at the high-water of fashion and display, to nurse an old gentleman suffering from gout, and in the temper that generally accompanies gout, was a trial that might have tested the quality of the most Patient Griselda of the nineteenth century.

Miss Hastings, however, was far from laying claim to a Griselda's equanimity under annoyance ; she was merely a good girl, with a liking for admiration and amusement, which good girls sometimes possess ; and with a sincere affection for the old father whose unlucky illness had put an end to her town-glories. To leave London, no doubt was disagreeable, but she did leave it, with a generous willingness that was worth the mechanical compliance of a score of such passive victims as the great proverbial prototype of obedient females.



There were those who remarked, that the sacrifice which Miss Hastings made was, after all, a very trifling one, since she was notoriously engaged to be married to William Morgan, Esquire, of Cramlingham and Stoneham Halls, as well as of various other seats in England and Wales, and especially in Wales, the jaw-breaking names of which latter mansions need not be enumerated for a second time in this history. A great match and a great catch—so the gossips in turbans avowed, somewhat enviously, with the entire concurrence of the bewigged old gentlemen who fill the bay-windows of the clubs. It was a match that the daughter of any of those dukes and earls, to count cousinship with whom had been the Right Honourable Robert's earliest and most solid claim to office, might have been glad to make, in a worldly point of view, of course—strictly in a worldly point of view.

That Flora Hastings was especially lucky, unnaturally, undeservedly, preposterously lucky, in having secured this golden prize in the lottery matrimonial, many envious tongues declared. But she was envied less for her supposed good-fortune, than perhaps any of her contemporaries would have been, and she was hated not at all. Mrs Hastings it was who incurred the familiar reproach of being mercenary, designing, and so on; and she, like a tough-hearted woman of the world, distressed herself very little about the murmurs of those dear friends who found it hard to forgive her such a great success.

Of Mrs Hastings, there is not much to be said. Of the world, worldly, she was yet a woman to be respected for her conduct in every relation of life. She did her duty as a wife, as a mother, and as a member of society, working stoutly and faithfully, according to the faith that was in her, to promote the social and political prosperity of her husband and her children. To the Right Honourable Robert, she was an invaluable partner in life, patiently and steadfastly labouring to keep the wives of the more influential statesmen of his party in good-humour, doing the honours of his house graciously, and offending no one who might by possibility be useful to the government. Her son found in her the kindest of confidantes; and it was due to her diplomacy that the debts of that young gentleman, now Secretary of Legation at some minor German court, had been three times paid by his growling father. She had displayed great tact and delicacy in the Morgan affair—neither scaring away the fish by too much eagerness, nor pressing upon Flora any gratuitous advice; and she was now serenely sure of having provided for her daughter's life-long happiness by the engagement she had so dexterously contrived.

So the Hastings family were at home under their picturesque roof of Shelton, and they had, in spite of the concurrence of the London season, plenty of guests of both sexes, highly creditable friends, well-born and well-mannered, but belonging to that section of Society that rather rubs shoulders with the rose than lays just claim to be the rose itself. It was hardly possible, indeed, that any one who had a real share in the political life that is, after all, the tonic and stimulant of our old-world system, and who had not the gout, should desert the great parliamentary arena, where swords and shields were still rattling, and where the war-cries of party-leaders resounded yet over the struggling throng of intellectual gladiators. Nor could

great ladies, whose receptions were trumpeted forth by the fashionable press months beforehand, desert their stifling drawing-rooms and opera-boxes to rusticate at Shelton. But there were two or three married couples, cadets of noble houses, who were scarcely sorry to curtail the campaign in Curzon Street, or elsewhere, after spending half a year's income in three months as a holocaust on Fashion's altar; and there were agreeable young-lady cousins from distant parts of England; and younger sons, with the true Pall Mall flavour about their yellow whiskers or trim moustaches, from the clubs and the Household Brigade.

Among these gentlemen, but hardly of them, was the son-in-law-elect, William Morgan, who resided, as a son-in-law-elect should do, according to antique custom, not at the manor-house, but at the *Regent Hotel*, in the pleasant bathing-place called *Shelton-on-Sea*. This young man's position was not very easily defined. He was at once above and below those with whom he daily associated. In right of his wealth, he was a person of very considerable importance. The ball lay at his foot, so to speak, awaiting till it should be his good pleasure to kick it to the goal. In the greatness of his means, he had a golden key, that in a bold and dexterous hand would unlock the enchanted portals of Fame's temple. He was so rich, that if he would but condescend to be clever, industrious, and decorous as to his way of living and opinions, men were willing that he should rule over them; taking in his early manhood such a share in the governing of the nation, as far abler men, after years of pain and toil, can only attain when their temples are getting bare, and their locks grizzled. Power, renown, rank, and the sweets of office, might be William Morgan's, on very easy terms indeed, supposing him to deserve them, so marvelously had his way in life been smoothed by the vast wealth that his sturdy parent had bequeathed to him.

But there was a reverse to the medal. The very dandies and loungers who envied this fortunate young man his dazzling prosperity, and spoke with an enforced respect of his wealth, despised the man himself. Nor was this wholly on account of the lowliness of his origin. They would not have looked with the same eyes upon old Morgan himself, the hero of the pickaxe and the fustian vest, who had fought his way to opulence. That ex-miner, ex-navigator, ex-subcontractor, and late millionaire, had been a very rugged diamond indeed, but hard and keen, as a diamond should be. His manners had been coarse, his bearing boisterous, and his language *Æolian* in its uncouth rusticity; but he was emphatically a man, and his manliness saved him from contempt. You may dislike, but you cannot despise, the most savage soldier who bears the reeking stains of war upon him, and who comes before you, gashed and gory, with the blood of his enemies mingled with his own. So William Morgan's father would, by the curled darlings of England, have been set down as a splendid old ruffian; a person to be avoided as much as might be, but highly respectable after his fashion, as a grisly bear is respectable after his.

But the old man was dead, sleeping, in the body, under half-a-dozen tons of Carrara marble in Cramlingham parish church, and it was William his son who reigned in his stead. By what strange law of Nature is it that as the son of a great statesman, or poet, or warrior, is commonly a fool, or at best a

washed-out copy of his progenitor, the heir of a self-made man is almost always deficient in the pith and vigour that marked his hard-working sire! At anyrate, William Morgan's was a case in point. He had several good qualities—was painstaking, well-meaning, and truthful, as well as wonderfully modest for so rich a youth, who had heard, from his boyhood up, in as strong and boastful words as old Mr Morgan could employ, that 'money made the man.' To say that the present possessor of Stoneham, Cramlingham, and the other manors, to say nothing of scrip, stock, shares, and mines in nearly every quarter of the world, bore his golden burden gracefully, would be untrue, but at least he was not liable to be taxed with vulgar arrogance.

He was painfully gentlemanly, one of those men who look upon gentlemanhood as an art to be acquired by long and severe study, and who suffer tortures of shame if they imagine themselves to have transgressed a canon of etiquette. His fellow-Etonians had, with the quick instinct that belongs to boys, found out this foible of William Morgan's, and had bantered him and jeered him in the merciless manner peculiar to school-boys and school-girls. At Oxford, the future lord of lands had worn a velvet cap, and his full purse had in a measure begun to be a barrier between the rude outer world and his own shrinking, serious, sensitive nature. The undergraduates of his time had not the heart to be very hard upon so openhanded, inoffensive, kindly a young fellow, and if they laughed at him, laughed when his back was turned. But there was some truth in the account that had been given of him by Laxington of the Eleusis Club. He had tried to take an interest in the pursuits that usually interest men of his age, and of the class in which he was tolerated rather than welcomed. His yacht, his racing-stable, his hunters, his Highland moor, were a weariness to their owner, yet he kept them up in liberal style. He was now about to enter upon political life—and matrimony. Such was the Right Honourable Robert's son-in-law expectant, who now walked, with slow steps, between the steep banks that skirted the road from the watering-place to Shelton Manor, on a fine July morning.

#### WHITED LONDON.

DEEP snow is not unknown in London, but it is unusual. As a general rule, it stays with us but a few hours, and leaves us all the dirtier for its visit. To-day, we are come home from the wash, unspotted and brilliant; to-morrow, we are like exceedingly dirty linen. But on the first day of the present year, matters were very different. There had been intense cold overnight; warning to the weather-wise of what was about to happen: and so, in the morning, to those who lay awake for a while before they were called, it seemed to be an extra Sunday. Not a sound was to be heard in the streets, ordinarily so full of bustle: no distant roar of early traffic; no neighbour noises of tradesmen's carts; no news-boys' calls (for all the papers, as well as the letters, were late); not even the tread of hurrying feet, which marks the hour when the 'working-clerks' hasten eastward, most of them still ruminating muffin.

'A deep snow, mem,' says my little maid with cheerfulness, for she comes from the country, and

such a visitation smacks to her pleasantly of home. She turns the venetians, and I am dazzled with the icy glitter; she pulls them up, and a white world peeps above the muslin blinds. Our street, although a respectable one, I hope, has never before attained such a speckless purity. Architecturally, it is not commendable, but the silver snow has transformed—more marvellously than any Frost-king in the pantomime I beheld last night—all ugliness to beauty, baldness to grace, and squalor to splendour. The approach to the Mews opposite, which is generally (to speak with moderation) not so clean as could be wished, is as bright and glittering as though it were the haunt of the Muses. The chimneys of Mrs Skinfint's house—a disgrace to our street, and only 'done up' once in seven years—are of frosted silver. Her attic windows are marvels of a decorative art, supposed to have been lost in the middle ages. The chipped balustrades in front of them, and the crazy verandah on her drawing-floor, are clothed in glittering splendour, such as no balcony in Venice could vie with, when decked out but lately in its richest bravery to welcome her long-lost king. The area railings are executed in aluminium, after a design by Mr John Frost, the Chartist, who takes a revolutionary pleasure in garnishing the Palace and the Poorhouse with the same gorgeous splendour. Even the road and the pavement have been supplied with a carpet of silver tissue, so thick that they lie beneath it as one: the lamp-posts only, electroplated with the same metal, and festooned with crystals, mark the dividing-line. The New Year has her white birthday robe on, and, of course, she is not 'short-coated.'

Cautionally peering over the blinds, I see that the 'working-clerks' are passing by as usual, although not at the same pace: they adopt a sort of rapid shuffle, which, however, makes no noise. If you can fancy the ghost in *Hamlet* 'at the double,' then you have it exactly as to their legs; but as to their arms, they incessantly flap them over their chests, like penguins. It is uncommonly cold, no doubt, although, when Betty lit the fire, I thought it as well to let it burn up before I made my toilet; out of the range of its rays, I tremble, I grow numb. It is excellent weather for men, I have no doubt, and perhaps for strong women; but for me, I own I quake and shake in fear when King Frost holds up his icy finger, commanding silence. At the same time, this biting weather does not make me cross, and I notice that everybody is unusually good-tempered. Even the importunate men who come with 'Clean your doorstep?' wear an honest grin, which culminates into a smile of gratitude for the glass of—I don't know what—which the cook gives them in addition to the promised shilling. I wonder where all the shovels come from, and the besoms, that make their appearance this rare morning! Whence, too, come the people that wield them? Is it possible that there are thirty thousand persons, or so, in this vast city, whose intermittent calling it is to clear doorsteps from snow? I watch them, while the tea is 'drawing,' through the wire-blind of the breakfast-room, and a more jovial set of workmen I never saw. It is a Sisyphean labour, for the snow is falling fast again; but they like it all the better for that: to-morrow there will be another shilling for them, and 'the mixture as before.'

The frosted windows all have children's faces behind them, not less beautiful than the delicate

tracery which their breaths efface. I love to see them, although I am myself a spinster, and likely to remain so, unless the first figure of my age (42) should happen to change places, in this miraculous Transformation day, with the last. How delighted are these little Londoners with the novel sight, and how they shew by signs their eagerness to be out and handling the treacherous substance. 'All is not silver that glitters, my pretty dears. I wish I could think that you would never meet with a greater disappointment than to grasp a handful of that shining mass, and get dirty water (and perhaps chilblains) for your pains.' They have actually opened the window of yonder nursery; if she was my servant that permitted such a thing (but mothers put such confidence in their nurses, to save themselves trouble), she should have a piece of my mind. I daresay the little dears are going to have snow and jam for their breakfasts; and I remember when I liked that combination amazingly myself, although it makes my teeth ache even to think of it now. Dear me! no wonder the children laugh, and even the fat baby kicks and struggles in its ecstasy at the humour of the scene. What respectable-looking gentlemen to be snowballing one another! and how they do enjoy it! I hope the elder one will not have his spectacles broken; I wish he wouldn't run such a risk; I have half a mind to open the window and say: 'You stupid man, why don't you take off your spectacles?' They have made it up now, however. How they smile and glow! and how the snow hangs on the little one's whiskers, making half his face ten years older! Then they brush one another, and trot on.

Everybody trots, for safety's sake as well as for warmth, since the half-cleared pavement is very slippery. You can hear their footsteps now, and also another sound beside the grinding and scraping of the shovels. It is the dull heavy fall of the snow which is being pitched from the house-roofs on to the roadway, and more often followed than preceded by the cry of, 'Heads below.' Mirth and work go hand in hand, this morning, as I have said; and without wishing to utterly overwhelm a passenger, the temptation to drop a few pounds of snow upon his hat and shoulders is almost irresistible. The look of indignation and surprise of the victim is followed by an expression of utter helplessness as the full conception of the inequality of the contest dawns upon him; then off he trots at an accelerated pace, and shaking his head with the menacing reflection of what he would do if he was thirty-six feet eight in height, and on a level with those impudent scoundrels.

Presently along the hitherto unsullied street comes the first cab, which is cheered as though it were the beginning of some National procession. Its progress is very slow, although it has two horses, one in the shafts, and the other (which is scarcely half its helpmate's size, and, if in a field, might have been taken for its colt), attached to the vehicle by ropes. There is much baggage on the roof; and the people inside are evidently cast down by the idea that they will not get in time for the train—which it is more than probable will be the case. The spectators, however, are not cast down, except myself. It is necessary that I should go to the City this morning, and I wonder how long it will take me so to do. Betty says: 'Lor, mem, don't go;' and is reproved for endeavouring to weaken my sense of Duty, which is rather inclined

to give way of itself. Escorted by that domestic, I venture forth in my warmest wraps. We seek the nearest thoroughfare in search of the usual public vehicle. I cannot figure to myself a state of things in which there are no omnibuses in London streets, but I now have it figured for me. Under the present dynasty, that mode of progression is prohibited. I might as well have looked for a scythe-wheeled chariot (first hint, perhaps, of 'the rotation of crops'), or one drawn by griffins *passant* and *rampant*, as in the fairy tales. There is an approach to this last description of conveyance in a Hansom cab drawn by a tandem, the leader of which, excited by the snow, walks on his hind-legs; at which Betty claps her hands. The driver mistakes her gesture of enthusiasm for a desire to become his fare; 'You might just as well ask me to be your husband,' is his impromptu reply, delivered at the top of his voice. 'Don't you see I am engaged, my dear?' This is a great relief to me, for nothing would have induced me to appear in so sporting a conveyance; but my embarrassment is even greater than it would have been in such a case, when he comes up to us very slowly, and points to a young man in his cab, whom I recognise as Mrs Skinfint's son and heir.

'Now, *this here* is something as calls himself a gentleman; yet, would you believe it, ladies, he's only going to pay me sixpence a mile for taking him an airing with two thoroughbreds through six feet of snow.—O no, we can't go any faster, my young gent.: the snow do ball so.' And with that he gets off his perch, and examines each of the eight hoofs with an imperturbable countenance. We hurry away very much faster than Mr Skinfint is likely to get along, and make for the great railway terminus, where omnibuses will certainly be, if anywhere. There are no omnibuses, and very little light. The huge glass roof has snow upon it a foot deep, and hundreds of men are standing upon it, on planks laid across the iron girders, lading the snow off with wooden shovels at the end of long poles, and as merry as though they were stirring Christmas-pudding. In the street close by, where the fine arts are cultivated in connection with the silent tomb, the common-place funeral emblems—the sea-sick female, the solid tea-chest, the urn and napkin—are glorified by the frosted snow into masterpieces beyond the reach of Phidias. In the squares, too, the statues—the contemplation of whose hideousness on ordinary occasions is sufficient to deprive us of the public services of the fastidious—are miracles of grace and beauty. The mounted ones in particular look like those exquisite race-cups which we see exhibited in the jewellers' windows on the eve of great sporting 'events,' but magnified fiftyfold. I dare say the National Gallery (though it doesn't lie in our way) would do credit to the country on a day like this; and likewise the Brompton Boilers.

'Mem, a Bus!' cries Betty (she meant 'Madam,' not *Nota Bene*, although the circumstance was remarkable), and sure enough, there comes an *Atlas*, toiling as though under his usual mythological weight, and with four horses, the breath of which surrounds their heads like a halo, and crystallises on their ears.

'Double fares, ladies,' explains the cad, respectfully, as he assists us into the vehicle: 'not as you're the sort to object to such a thing; only we've got a fellar here as does, and so it's as well to understand one another.'

He pointed to a stout individual, sitting next the door, and with a countenance even redder than the frosty air could reasonably account for. He had, I conjecture, been exposed to the fire of the conductor's wit for some distance, in consequence of refusing to pay the increased fare, and his enemy nursed his wrath and kept it warm with a vengeance. Young Mr Skinfint may have been delayed upon his journey, but he was not held up to the scorn of thirteen of his fellow-creatures from the Swiss cottage to the Bank, as this gentleman was. Like Betty, he was, or professed himself to be, a provincial; and the excuse he put forward for his economy was founded upon public grounds. 'The town,' he said, 'so far from being a deserving object of generosity, was always robbing the country; and for his part, when he gave away money, it was to those who deserved it, and his own people: charity began at home.'

'O yes,' rejoined the implacable conductor, 'I should think you was a very likely chap to break your back with liftin' country people's burdens. O lor, yes; just the man! Country indeed! I daresay you've sent your sufferin' to the Mansion House for the relief of them poor colliery-folk; they're in the country, you know, though it's underground. A sufferin'-why, I put it to anybody—I put it to you, ma'am' (here he appealed to the embarrassed Betty), 'did this fellow ever see a sufferin'?'

'If you ever had one,' exclaimed the victim, exasperated into repartee, 'it was that one you stole.'

'Now, look here,' observed the conductor, swinging himself from his perch, where he had been carrying on the conversation, head aside, like a malevolent parrot, and alighting on the doorway, so as to address the company with more effect: 'you will please to take notice that this individual, who is so good to the country, has called me a rogue.—"Well," says you (still addressing Betty, who had certainly not spoken one word), "why don't you prosecute the varmint for defamation of karakter?"—

'Why, because you wouldn't trust yourself within five miles of a police-court,' put in the victim triumphantly—'that's why.'

'A perleece-court! Why, certainly you must come from the country to be sich a hignoramus as that. Why, it's a judge, not a beak, as would have to settle your hash, only you ain't worth powder and shot. You're a man of straw—what they call a scarecrow in the country, don't they?—Give to the poor? Why, you haven't even the inclination to do it, let alone the money. Not a crumb, not a blanket, not a coal—though you'll go at last where coals is cheap enough, mind ye;' &c. &c. &c.

I have heard of discussions 'in the schools'—although I don't know exactly what schools—and arguments held in public between rival ecclesiastics or politicians, but for fluency and vigour, I am sure no casuist or debater ever equalled that Conductor of the *Atlas*. At the same time, the exhibition quite determined me not to return by omnibus, even if we should have the luck to find one. After I had concluded my City business, we therefore repaired to the Underground Railway. At the station, we found not only the ordinary passengers in waiting for their westward train, but all the host of omnibus and cab travellers, who had been deprived of their usual means

of locomotion. Of the female sex, however, Betty and I were the sole representatives; and when the train came up, already full to repletion, with a dozen or more in each of the first-class carriages, built for eight, we were gallantly accommodated with seats, and the gentlemen who gave them up sat upon the elbow-seats beside us, with their heads touching the roof, like guardian Caryatides. But, indeed, nobody was kept out on the score of want of room; the exigency of the time was cheerfully recognised, and a more good-humoured though close-packed company it was impossible to find.

By this time, the Underground Railway was the only well-lighted thoroughfare in London. The gas jets in the shop-windows pierced but a little way into the yellow fog, and plunged in yet deeper gloom all that lay beyond it. There were no groups of idlers to be seen, as usual, about the photograph and book shops; but in front of every scientific instrument-maker's loomed large and eager crowds, engaged in reading the temperature.

'Twenty-six degrees below freezing-point last night,' advertised one of these clerks of the weather. And 'We shall have some jolly good skating to-morrow,' was the universal comment passed upon the information. The mercury in the barometer seemed to vary in inverse ratio with one's fellow-creatures' spirits. I had never seen London look so beautiful, or its inhabitants so happy, as on that first day of the deep snow.

But, with the next morning, came the monotonous wail of the frozen-out gardeners, and that cry for food and warmth, which is never to cease from the land, but is loudest and most pitiful in snow-time. I think Charity did her best wherever the plaint was trustworthy: few who had aught to give refused the poor shivering creatures (not beggars, you will understand) who besought for coal-tickets in weather such as that. But the battle with Frost goes always against the Poor. For my part, seeing what I did, I was glad when London lost its icy splendours, since they cost so much to those who can least afford to pay: when the vast whited sepulchre became more hideous and squalid than ever with sudden thaw: when the trotting and flapping of the cheery skaters bound for the parks were heard no more in the frozen streets, and the sorry gnomes 'Squelsh,' 'Squash,' 'Drip,' and 'Thud' took the place of the sparkling genii that minister to the Frost-king.

#### DISGUISE.

Many golden flow'rets lie

In the orbs of April daisies;

Many buds have more than eye

Can discern that lightly gazes.

Many hearts that careless seem,

Have no lack of feeling deep;

Frattle they like pebbled stream;

Thus they hide the thoughts they keep;

And, alas! while silver strings

Only wake with silver tones,

Timid Truth a music dings

Which belies the thought she owns.